



STRONG START FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN ACT

The early childhood education proposal is a 10-year initiative to expand and improve early learning opportunities for children across the birth to age 5 continuum. The bill would fund preschool for 4-year old children from families earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and encourage states to spend their own funds to support preschool for young children with family incomes above that income level. The legislation would establish a new federal-state partnership with formula funding for 4-year old preschool, with a state match, to all eligible states, based on each state's proportion of 4-year olds under 200% of the FPL. States would provide subgrants to high-quality, local providers, including local educational agencies (LEAs) and community-based providers (such as child care and Head Start programs) that have partnerships with LEAs. The bill also authorizes a new Early Head Start partnership with child care to improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers.

Title I – PREKINDERGARTEN ACCESS

Purposes

- Establish a new federal-state partnership to provide access to high-quality prekindergarten programs for all low-income and moderate-income children to ensure kindergarten readiness.

Key Definitions

- Eligible Local Entity – an LEA (including a charter school), a high-quality early childhood education program, or a consortium of such programs.
- High-Quality Prekindergarten Program
 - Serves children who turn 3 or 4 by the eligibility determination date (as used for school eligibility in the community in which the eligible entity is involved);
 - Requires high staff qualifications, including a bachelor's degree for teachers;
 - Evidence-based maximum class size and child-instructional staff ratio;
 - Maintains evidence-based health and safety standards;
 - Offers a full-day program;
 - Provides developmentally-appropriate, evidence-based curricular and learning environments aligned with the state's early learning standards;
 - Offers salaries comparable with K-12 teacher salaries;
 - Provides high-quality staff professional development;
 - Provides accessible comprehensive services, including health, mental health, dental, vision screening, referrals and assistance in obtaining services (when appropriate), family engagement, nutrition and other support services as determined in a local needs analysis; and
 - Provides ongoing program evaluation.

Allotments and Reservations

- Formula grants based on the number of 4-year old children who come from families with incomes at 200% of FPL or below
- .5% to the Secretary of the Interior for the areas served by the Bureau of Indian Affairs
- .5% to the territories and outlying areas, as determined by the Secretary
- 1% or \$30 million for federal technical assistance, evaluation and administration

State Eligibility Criteria

State Must:

- Have established, or will establish, early learning standards aligned with its K-12 system that are developmentally-appropriate, and culturally and linguistically appropriate and address all domains of school readiness, including physical well-being, motor development, social-emotional development, literacy and language development, approaches to learning, cognition/general knowledge, and early math and scientific development;
- Have the ability, or will develop the ability, to link preschool data link into its K-12 system for children in federally-funded early childhood education programs;
- Have established a State Early Childhood Education and Care Council; and
- Provide state-funded Kindergarten.

State Applications

State Assurances:

- Coordinate with and continue to participate in specific federally-funded early childhood programs: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) programs
- Administering state agency coordinates with the State Educational Agency (SEA), if it isn't the SEA
- Establishment of high-quality state prekindergarten standards

States Must Describe Plans to:

- Serve high-quality preschool to all 4-year olds in the state with family incomes below 200% of the FPL, and after achieving that, serve 3-year olds;
- Monitor programs and evaluate program outcomes understandable to parents;
- Expand services to children in families earning above 200% of the FPL;
- Establish an age-appropriate early learning assessment program;
- Implement program measures and targets, and establish accountability for local eligible entities' use of funds;
- Support the acquisition of teacher credentials in early childhood, or a closely related field, and ensure institutions of higher education support this effort;
- Coordinate local activities with existing federally-funded programs, including Head Start; the Social Services Block Grant; IDEA; CCDBG; MIECHV; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families grants; early literacy programs; and Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge;

- Coordinate state activities with related programs funded by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, IDEA, Head Start, CCDBG, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act;
- Encourage coordination with community-based learning resources (libraries, museums, parks and rec);
- Address needs of Dual Language Learners;
- Integrate state early learning standards into the prekindergarten program;
- Provide supports for workforce development supports for existing and new providers;
- Provide sufficient facilities;
- Collaboration between community-based providers and local educational agencies (LEAs); and
- Increase the number of children in high-quality Kindergarten, including the children served by this prekindergarten program.

State Use of Funds

- States may set-aside 20% of its formula funding in the first four years of implementation to increase quality, particularly for workforce supports and professional development;
- States may serve four-year olds below 200% of the FPL in a state, and if a state achieves universal, sustained access to prekindergarten for four year olds, it may begin providing subgrants to serve 3 years olds below 200% of FPL; if a locality provides universal access to its four year olds a state may begin providing subgrants to serve 3 year olds in that locality as long as it does not diminish access to 4 year olds in other parts of the state;
- States may set-aside 15% for high-quality early childhood education and care for infants/toddlers.
 - The Secretary of Education would be responsible for disbursement of funds
 - The Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services would determine the most appropriate means of administering these programs for infants and toddlers.

Performance Measures and Targets

- Increasing school readiness;
- Narrowing school readiness gaps;
- Reducing special education placements;
- Reducing the need for grade retention; and
- Increasing the number of high-quality programs and children in those programs.
- States are prohibited from using the funds to use a single assessment as the primary or sole method for assessing program effectiveness; or to reward or sanction children or teachers.

Matching Requirements

- Over 10 years, the match is an increasing state contribution, from 10% of the federal amount in the first year to an equal share of the federal amount by the 8th year.
- A reduced match rate would be available for states serving preschool to half or more of eligible 4-year olds.
- Supplanting is prohibited; Maintenance of Effort is required.

Eligible Local Entity Applications

Must Describe Plans for the Following:

- Comprehensive parent and family engagement policies;
- Coordination with Head Start, CCDBG, IDEA and other early childhood education programs;
- Joint staff training with school staff;
- Comprehensive transition-to-Kindergarten policies;
- Address particular needs of homeless children, English language learners, children with disabilities, children in foster care, and free and reduced price lunch eligible children;
- Ensure program access and provider support for homeless children and migrant children;
- Carrying out a community needs assessment to identify any additional on-site, local comprehensive services; and
- Supports for workforce to gain relevant credentials, and professional development for general early childhood skills and working with special populations.
- For use of subgrants, a local entity must have strong partnerships with an LEA; if the subgrantee is an LEA, it must have a strong partnership with community-based early childhood education providers.

Reports

- Annual state reports to ED and HHS on how funds are being used, progress toward outcomes and coverage, how states are overcoming barriers to effectively serve children;
- Data on the operational weekly number each local entity provides in each LEA; and
- Number and percentage of children by race, income, age, disability, English language learner, homelessness, full-day programs and cost to families.
- ED would compile and summarize state reports and submit to Congress annually.

Prekindergarten Development Grants

- The bill establishes grants for states not receiving prekindergarten formula grants. These development grants would be used to help states increase their capacity for preschool formula grants. States could use funding to improve the quality of their current prekindergarten programs or to establish prekindergarten programs if they do not currently support any.
- States would be required to provide a 20% match for the grant.
- States would be able to subgrant to early childhood education programs and local school districts to improve the quality of prekindergarten programs in the state.

Head Start

- HHS would develop a process to convert Head Start programs from serving 4-year olds to serving 3-year olds and infants/toddlers in Early Head Start programs, and report to Congress.

Title II – EARLY HEAD START – CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIPS

- Establishes Early Head Start – child care partnerships to help child care centers and family child care homes improve their quality of coordinated, comprehensive services for infants and toddlers and children through age 3, particularly to support providers gaining relevant credentials and help programs blend funds to create a full day of services.
- Provides competitive grants to Early Head Start agencies in partnership with a child care center or home to help them meet Early Head Start performance standards. Allocates funds to states based on the number of young children with family incomes below the FPL; reserves 3% for Indian Head Start programs and 4.5% for migrant and seasonal Head Start programs.

Title III – CHILD CARE

- Amends the CCDBG to allow the Secretary of HHS to reserve \$100 million to support child care training, licensure and professional development and workforce incentives, and improve health and safety standards to expand quality;
- Ensures that all children who receive support through CCDBG shall receive care for at least a year before a family has to redetermine its eligibility;
- Asks states to better coordinate its other block grants to ensure consistency in the application and implementation of child care funds in states.

Title IV – MATERNAL, INFANT, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD HOMEVISITING PROGRAM

- Expresses a “sense of the Congress” that Congress should continue to fund evidence-based, voluntary home visitation programs under MIECHV to promote maternal and child health, improve school readiness, prevent child abuse and neglect, support family economic self-sufficiency, reduce crime and delinquency, and improve community resources.